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STATE FOR EUR/CARC

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [GG](#)
SUBJECT: BURJANADZE REACHING OUT TO OPPOSITION

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft, reason 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) The Ambassador met privately with Nino Burjanadze, Speaker of Parliament, on November 6. The meeting took place at the Parliament and about 2000 demonstrators were outside the building. Burjanadze said that she had been talking to more moderate members of the opposition leadership, including Kakha Kukava and Davit Usupashvili. She felt that some progress had been made with these opponents on electoral reform. Burjanadze said that the government is prepared to change the "winner-take-all" system for choosing MP's from multi-seat electoral districts to a proportional regional system. Although she sees no possibility of changing the makeup of the Central Electoral Commission, as sought by the opposition, she does think that opposition representatives can be added to regional and local election commissions. She said that when the opposition talks about political prisoners, they are referring to Irakli Batiashvili, jailed for assisting the warlord Kvitsiani in the Kodori Gorge, before the GOG retook control in 2006. She has promised Kukava and Usupashvili she will do what she can to obtain his release. She said that the Patriarch has asked President Saakashvili to pardon Batiashvili, but that this requires a formal request and process to accomplish. The Ambassador thanked her for her efforts to resolve the political crisis and urged her to continue.

¶2. (C) Burjanadze was particularly concerned about the role played by oligarch Badri Patarkatsishvili in the protests. Patarkatsishvili is playing for keeps, she said. She alleged he is paying protesters 15 lari per day and doing all he can to keep the demonstrations going. His reason is that he knows if the opposition loses, he is finished in Georgia. The problem Patarkatsishvili poses, Burjanadze said, is that even if a deal can be reached with the moderate opposition, it will not end the political uproar that serves Patarkatsishvili's ends. It is hard for her to see a way out, with the moderates increasingly being pushed to the side and an overarching struggle going on between Patarkatsishvili and President Saakashvili.

¶3. (C) Later that day, in a speech to Parliament, Burjanadze confirmed that the government is ready to negotiate on three of the four demands of the opposition, leaving aside only the holding of early elections. The election date was established to avoid Russian provocations in the election period, Burjanadze said, and she hopes at least some of the people not protesting will understand this. She acknowledged the social problems that motivate many of the protesters and the population at large. She promised the government will work to solve those problems. As an example of one of the mistakes the government has made, she counted making Okruashvili a minister and allowing him to remain in the government.
TEFFT